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# A Biblical Response to **CANCEL** CULTURE

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# A Biblical Response to Cancel Culture

Eric Lyons, M.Min.

Article In Brief...



**Christians are often tempted to respond to cancel culture with the impatience of an angry child or the tit-for-tat retaliation of a driver with road rage. Yet, regardless of ridicule, censorship, or termination, the Bible speaks clearly and voluminously about how God's people are expected to respond to a corrupt world that calls "evil good, and good evil." Christians are called to a higher standard. "[B]e swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."**

**C**AMBRIDGE Dictionary defines "cancel culture" as "a way of behaving in a society or group, especially on social media, in which it is common to completely reject or stop supporting someone because they have said or done something that offends you."<sup>1</sup> Last year, Joe Rogan, the world's most popular podcaster (with nearly 13 million subscribers), was the target of many in mainstream and social media for some of his comments regarding COVID-19 and vaccinations.<sup>2</sup> In 2020, many called for the canceling of the world's most popular author, J.K. Rowling. The author of the *Harry Potter* series, who is no defender of biblical sexual values, is a believer in, and occasional defender of, the reality of bio-

logical sex (i.e., men are males and women are females). For not toeing the more politically correct party line of transgender identity, Rowling was blistered on social media and suffered waves of harassment and cancellations.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, many Christians (and those associated with Christianity) in the U.S. have felt the sting of cancel culture.

- On December 6, 2018 in West Point, Virginia, "the school board overseeing West Point High School voted unanimously to terminate the employment of French teacher Peter Vlaming" for refusing "to use a transgender student's preferred pronoun, citing religious reasons."<sup>4</sup> Though Vlaming was "well-

liked by his students, and did his best to accommodate their needs and requests,"<sup>5</sup> and "consistently accommodated the [transgender] student by using the student's preferred name instead of the student's given name" (avoiding the use of any pronoun),<sup>6</sup> Vlaming was ultimately fired for "something he couldn't say."<sup>7</sup>

- In January 2021, Twitter locked the account of *Daily Citizen*, a magazine owned by Focus on the Family. What was the magazine's violation? They posted: "On Tuesday, President-elect Joe Biden announced that he had chosen Dr. Rachel Levine to serve as Assistant Secretary for Health at the Department of HHS. Dr. Levine is a transgender woman, that is, a man who believes he is a woman."<sup>8</sup> Twitter proceeded to send *Daily Citizen* an email pointing out that "repeated violations may lead to a permanent suspension of your account."<sup>9</sup>
- It seems more than acceptable to be pro-abortion in the corporate world. However, when John Gibson, the CEO of Tripwire Interactive (a video game developer), tweeted on September 4, 2021, how proud he was of the U.S. Supreme Court for "affirming the Texas law banning abortion for babies with a heartbeat," he was quickly canceled. Gibson's tweet "drew fire on social media,"<sup>10</sup> and the CEO found himself without a job only two days later when Tripwire announced the company was moving forward with a new interim CEO.

We could go on and on with examples such as these from just the past decade. The fact is, the U.S. has become increasingly more non-religious and immoral in the past

50 years<sup>11</sup> and increasingly intolerant of what the Bible teaches about many things. Suffice it to say, being a Bible-believing, Jesus-following, Gospel-teaching Christian in 21<sup>st</sup>-century America (regardless of how genuinely kind you might be) may very well get you, your family, church, Christian school, podcast, Twitter account, etc. canceled one way or another.

## CANCEL CULTURE IS NOTHING NEW FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

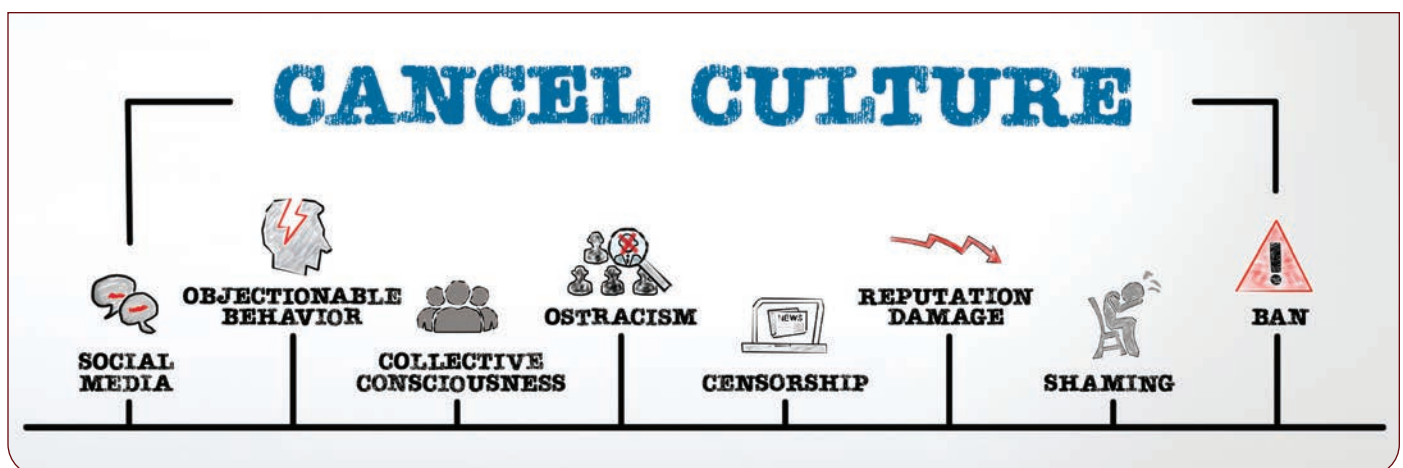
**A**M I saddened that America is not nearly as religious as previous generations? Am I sickened by a society that has become increasingly more like the one Isaiah saw in Jerusalem 2,700 years ago—where people “call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5:20)? Most certainly. Though America has always been far from perfect, it seems that sin has never been as publicly, prevalently, and perversely celebrated as it is today. Still, Christians must consider current events in light of history. We should be careful not to get too “bent out of shape” about cancel culture in light of the fact that cancel culture is nothing new for God’s people. Acting as if “this is so unbelievable” is pretty naïve in light of all that the Bible teaches.

When Abraham’s great-grandson Joseph died in Egypt, along with all of his generation, a new king arose “who did not know Joseph” (Exodus 1:8). Shortly thereafter, Pharaoh and the Egyptians began making the day-by-day lives of the Israelites increasingly miserable. “[T]hey set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens” (1:11). “[T]he Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage” (1:13-14). The king of Egypt even went so far as to cancel the ever-growing population of the Israelites by commanding the Hebrew midwives to kill all the newborn sons of the Israelites, sparing only the daughters (1:16). When this plan failed, “Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, ‘Every son who is born you shall cast into the river’” (1:22).

Living as faithful spokesmen of God has been quite trying throughout most of world history. (It may be that preachers have never had it easier than in the United States over the past half-century.) The prophet Samuel feared King Saul would kill him for anointing David as the next king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:1-13). During the days of Queen Jezebel, she “massacred the prophets of the Lord,” which led Obadiah to hide 100 prophets in caves (1 Kings 18:4). [Yet, King

Ahab called the prophet Elijah the “troubler of Israel” (1 Kings 18:17)!] When Jezebel threatened to end the life of Elijah, “he arose and ran for his life” (1 Kings 19:2-3). The faithful prophet Micaiah was insulted, struck, and imprisoned for speaking God’s unpopular truth to King Ahab (1 Kings 22:1-40). The prophet Jeremiah was threatened, beaten, put in stocks, and cast into a cistern full of mud and left to die (prior to being rescued—Jeremiah 20:1-2; 38:1-13).

Threatened by the arrival of the promised Messiah, the wicked King Herod the Great sought to kill baby Jesus and thus “sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under” (Matthew 2:16). Herod Antipas imprisoned John the baptizer “for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’ Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him” (Mark 6:17-19). She eventually got her wish. The courageous prophet of God and forerunner of Christ was **permanently canceled** by being beheaded. An executioner literally “brought his head on a platter” to the daughter of Herodias, who in turn “gave it to her mother” (Mark 6:27-28).





During Jesus' ministry, the hard-hearted, hypocritical religious leaders of His day continually sought to cancel Him. As soon as the perfectly meek and sinless Son of God began to reveal Himself as the long-awaited Messiah in His hometown of Nazareth, "all those in the synagogue...were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff" (Luke 4:16-30). Thankfully, Jesus escaped.

On another occasion, Jesus' enemies "took up stones to throw at Him" (John 8:59). After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Jewish chief priests and Pharisees "plotted to put Him to death...from that day on" (John 11:53). Ultimately, Jesus was arrested, mocked, beaten, scourged, and nailed to a cross.

Early Christianity was born into a world of cancel culture. Jesus had prophesied that the apostles would "have tribulation" (John 16:33) and, indeed, they did. In Acts 2, on the first Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the apostles were mocked as being drunk (Acts 2:13). Soon thereafter, the apostles were arrested three times. They were threatened, imprisoned, and beaten by their Jewish rulers (Acts 4-5). Herod killed the apostle James and then arrested Peter with the likely intention of killing him, too (12:1-4). Stephen was stoned to death for preaching Bible Truth to a "stiff-necked" people (7:51-60). Then "a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem," and they were "scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria" (8:1).

Shortly afterward, Saul, an oppressor of the Church, became a follower of Christ—a member of the very Church he previously sought to destroy (Acts 9:1-19). Not surprisingly, Saul (whose name was changed to Paul—13:9) became the

oppressed rather than the oppressor. Paul was persecuted from the time he became a Christian (9:23-25) throughout the rest of his life. The attempted canceling of Paul and his preaching by Jews and Gentiles is a recurring theme in the book of Acts as well as in Paul's epistles. To the church at Corinth he wrote about his "stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often" (2 Corinthians 11:23). He said: "From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned" (2 Corinthians 11:24-25).

If the early Church could hear Christians in today's America complain about cancel culture, I cannot help but think they would tell us to "toughen up." Christians today in North Korea, China, or various Middle Eastern countries would gladly exchange their cruel and repressive cancel culture for ours. Could it be that our God above is looking down upon us wondering why we are not endeavoring to have a broader, more biblically and historically informed perspective on current events?

I'm not saying cancel culture is not real. I'm not suggesting we be unsympathetic toward anyone who has suffered the loss of a job, public humiliation, relentless criticism, emotional stress, financial difficulties, etc.—especially for righteousness' sake. I'm not advocating we refrain from praying and voting for morally minded, potential U.S. leaders who might be able to help turn the tide of cancel culture on local, state, and national levels. But I am imploring God's people not to act as if (1) we are the only ones to face cancel culture or (2) we have it that hard, comparatively speaking.

## RESIST THE CANCEL-CULTURE MENTALITY

**T**HE temptation to react to cancel culture with a similar canceling mentality is real. Like immature children, we are tempted to respond to ridicule with ridicule, to wrath with wrath, and to censorship with censorship. However, God calls us to a much higher standard. We can choose to be like the angry cancel-culture mob in Acts 7—an incensed crowd who "shouted with loud voices, and covered their ears and rushed" at Stephen (Acts 7:57, NASB), and "cast him out of the city and stoned him" (7:58). Or, we can choose to follow the instructions of God and be "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20). We can choose to cancel unkind classmates and co-workers, or we can choose to be Christ-like and "turn the other cheek" and "go the extra mile" (cf. Matthew 5:39,41). Jesus taught: "[I]f you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good

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to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same” (Luke 6:32-33). “I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:44-45).

Jesus knew before He ever came to Earth that most people would either hate Him or care nothing for Him. He knew He was coming into a chaotic cancel culture, yet He still came for the purpose of saving souls. One thousand years before Christ, David prophesied that the Messiah would be “scorned by everyone, despised by the people.” The people would “mock” Him and “hurl insults, shaking their heads” (Psalm 22:6-7, NIV). They would “shoot out the lip” at the Lord (Psalm 22:7, NKJV). Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be “despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). Sure enough, when Jesus stepped out of heaven to heal the sin-stained, broken souls of humanity, “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11).

Jesus willfully came to reside in and engage a world full of the cancel-culture mentality. He came to a people who would go so far to cancel Him that they brutally crucified Him. Yet, Jesus responded with love, open arms, and a forgiving spirit. Jesus communicated love from the cross to the very end. We don’t hear Him saying, “I’m going to get you for this,” but “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). He showed concern for others, including for the penitent thief dying next to Him.

Before Jesus’ crucifixion, His invitation was open: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy

laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Ever since His crucifixion and resurrection, His invitation for anyone to receive eternal life has remained open: “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

This same Jesus said, “Go into **all** the world [even to cancel-culture] and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Don’t withdraw from cancel culture and allow your light to go dim. Rather, even in—yes, especially in—a dark world, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). As Peter said: “**Always** be ready to give a defense to **everyone** who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). As Paul wrote to the church at Colosse: “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity” (Colossians 4:5, NASB).

## RESPOND TO CANCEL CULTURE WITH...

**S**o how should we engage a culture that seems to be growing less religious and more intolerant toward Christianity day by day? What biblical principles and precepts must we keep in the forefront of our minds as we face increasing amounts of intimidation and discrimination?

### Courageous Determination to Be Faithful

Regardless of all that is going on around us and regardless of what happens to us, God expects His people to “not be afraid of what you are about to suffer” but “be faithful, even to the point of death” (Revelation 2:10).<sup>12</sup> If Noah could be faithful and do “all that the Lord commanded him” (Genesis 7:5), even while living during a time when “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5), then so can we. If Job could trust God and “not sin nor charge God with wrong” (Job 1:22; 13:15), even while his world caved in

(cont. on p. 128)

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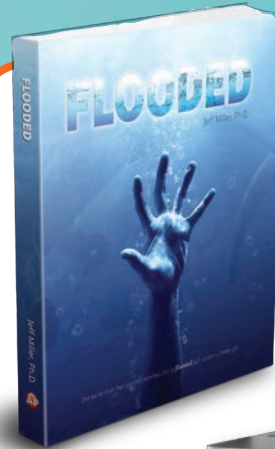
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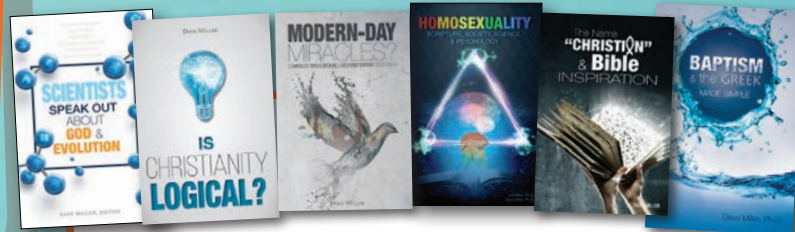


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around him, we, too, can be faithful even when the world seems to be caving in around us. If Moses could face Pharaoh's wrath with the courageous determination to follow the Lord, then so can we. If Joshua and Caleb could face the giants of their day, if Daniel could face a lion's den, and if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego could face a fiery furnace, then we have no excuses.

Are things hard now? Perhaps. Will things be much more challenging in the future? Probably. Regardless, "be strong and very courageous" (Joshua 1:7), "[f]or God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Though there are many "enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things," God calls us to remember our heavenly citizenship (Philippians 3:18-20). With dogged determination, we are to be "reaching forward to those things which are ahead" and "press[ing] toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

## Patience

Cancel culture nearly always rushes to judgment. The mainstream media tends to be quick to pounce on people, especially those whom they dislike. Perhaps nowhere is quick-tempered impatience seen more than on social media—where lashing, gnashing, and trashing are commonplace and where drama is stirred 24/7.

Christians desperately need to take a deep breath, clear their minds daily, and cautiously navigate the tumultuous world around us, including and especially on social media. We need to meditate regularly upon the fact that Almighty God is "the God of patience"

(Romans 15:5). Peter wrote about how "the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah" (1 Peter 3:20)—seemingly for 120 years before judging the world with the Flood (Genesis 6:3).<sup>13</sup> The Lord then waited some 400 years before judging the iniquity of the Amorites and the rest of the wicked Canaanite nations (Genesis 15:14-16). The Bible is clear in its portrayal of God: He is "longsuffering...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:5).

With the perfect example of patience set before us in the very nature of the God we serve, how can Christians not strive to be patient and longsuffering toward the lost world around us (as well as each other)? "[T]he works of the flesh" include many sinful characteristics of cancel culture: "hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy...and the like" (Galatians 5:19-21). On the other hand, "the fruit of the Spirit is...longsuffering" (Galatians 5:22). Yes, God expects Christians to "walk worthy of the

calling with which you were called... with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1-2). So, rather than be quick-tempered and jump at the opportunities to try to cancel what we deem to be cancel culture, "let us not grow weary while doing good.... [A]s we have opportunity, let us do good to all" (Galatians 6:9-10).

## Love

Hateful things are often said and done on social media. Hostility toward one group or another is often highlighted and fomented by various news outlets. Christians are often accused of being hateful for believing and teaching what the Bible says about many things, including God's creation of two (and only two) genders (Genesis 1:27; 2:7,18-24), the sanctity of all human life (including the unborn),<sup>14</sup> all forms of sexual immorality (Romans 1:26-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11), and the narrow road to eternal life going only through the Savior, Jesus Christ (John 14:6). The entirety of God's Word has never been popular with the majority of humanity. The response sometimes (or oftentimes)

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is to accuse Christians of being hateful.

However the world acts (or reacts); whatever is said about Jesus, His Word, His Church, or individual Christians; regardless of what the world does, God's instructions are clear: "love the Lord" and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). Never respond to hateful words or actions with a mean spirit. Christians are commanded to "detest what is evil" (Romans 12:9, NASB) while loving the precious soul who sadly commits it. If "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15), including murderers and persecutors of Christians (e.g., Saul), then are followers of Christ not to love sinners like Jesus did (John 3:16-17; Romans 5:6-8)? Certainly, we are.

As you interact with the unbelieving world on a regular basis, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person" (Colossians 4:6, NASB).

Avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.... [A] servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will (2 Timothy 2:23-26).

### Sincerity

Paul warned, "Let love be without hypocrisy" (Romans 12:9). Peter similarly wrote: "[L]ove one another fervently with a pure heart...laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking" (1 Peter 1:22; 2:1). Jesus called out many of the religious leaders of His day,

saying, "[Y]ou...outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:28). Thus, the Lord warns us "that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

Before Paul wrote to Timothy, instructing him to "preach the word" and "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:2,5), he **first** highlighted the vital "**genuine** [unhypocritical]<sup>15</sup> faith that is in you" (2 Timothy 1:5). Furthermore, years prior to Paul penning 2 Timothy, he desired this young

*"Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."*  
1 Peter 3:14-16

servant of Christ to accompany him on his second missionary journey (into some hostile, pagan cancel-culture societies—Acts 16-17). Note carefully, however, that Paul only wanted this **after** coming to learn that Timothy "was well spoken of by the brethren" (Acts 16:2-3). That is, those who knew him best were genuinely able to vouch for his sincere love for the Lord and His Church.

Cancel culture can often sniff out a hypocrite (especially one with whom they disagree) at lightning

speed. However, such microscopic examination by the enemies of Christianity should be expected and even welcomed. Sincere Christians, though imperfect, should have nothing to hide. If we do, our prayer should be that our hypocrisy comes to light as soon as possible in the hopes of bringing about personal repentance and restoration so that as little damage as possible is done to the Lord's Church.

To restore any lost reputation, Christians should begin living a simple, honest, sincere, loving, humble, patient, and persistent life one day at a time. Trying to force a restored reputation upon society will appear (especially to cancel culture) as insincere and as though you are trying to bully your way back into the good graces of others.<sup>16</sup> Instead, let things come about more naturally over time, as a consequence of a genuine daily walk with the Lord. In the long run, as the old "Sheep Thief" story goes (where sheep thieves were caught and branded with the letters ST on their foreheads), a real penitent person will eventually become known as a sincere "saint" (and not the "sheep thief" that he once was).

### Reason

Cancel culture is generally unreasonable. Canceling tactics often include shouting, bullying, threatening, slander, discriminating, and trying to silence the opposition in the public square (whether in person or on social media). It seems rare for individuals and groups with a cancel-culture mentality to want to reason together in a cool, calm, and rational manner.

The prophet Isaiah responded to the moral corruption of his day (especially under King Ahaz's reign—2 Chronicles 28:19) by calling his hearers to "[c]ome now, and let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18). When the prophet Samuel addressed

the nation of Israel at King Saul's coronation, he did not deliver an emotionally based speech but "reason[ed]" with them (1 Samuel 12:7). Consider also the stark contrast between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. In hopes of getting the attention of the false god Baal, these emotionally charged, pretend prophets "leaped about the altar," "cried aloud," and "cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them" (1 Kings 18:26,28)—all for naught. Elijah, on the other hand, had a rational faith that was grounded in the Word of God. He said to God, "I have done all these things **at Your Word**" (1 Kings 18:36). His faith, as well as the message of faith that He preached, were rooted and grounded in the Heavenly revealed, rational Word of God.

When Jesus healed a demon-possessed man, His enemies illogically charged Him with casting out demons "by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 12:24). Jesus responded, not with hate speech, but with a sensible argument: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges" (Matthew 12:25-27).

In Ephesus, Paul had spent months in the local synagogue and years in the school of Tyrannus "reasoning" about Christianity. Paul "coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel" (20:33). His message was true; his defense was logical; his intentions were honorable. The Ephesian idolaters, however, were the exact opposite. Whereas Paul reasoned that "they are not gods which are made with hands" (19:26), the pagan Ephesians were more con-

cerned about money and tradition than truth and reason (19:25). They proceeded to be driven by angry emotions as "the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord.... [M]ost of them did not even know why they had come together." Yet, for **two hours**, "all with one voice cried out... 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!'" (19:29,32,34). Imagine that—repeatedly shouting the same exact expression ("*Megala a Artemis Ephesion*") for 120 minutes. Such mob-like tactics (1) seem somewhat characteristic of the cancel culture of our day and (2) are **the very opposite** of how New Testament Christians are to conduct themselves.

Do not miss the stark contrast between the true Gospel of Jesus Christ that Paul defended and the repetitive, emotionally charged nonsense that Demetrius and the pagan Gentiles preached. Paul "persuaded and turned away many people" from idolatry to the true and living God in Ephesus and "throughout almost all of Asia" (Acts 19:26). He did it without force or the threat of force. He did it without reverting to dishonest, foolish tactics. It was with crystal-clear arguments that could withstand scrutiny and with genuine love for the Lord and lost souls that Paul sought to persuade open-minded, honest-hearted people to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Continual Teaching

Finally, though Christians living within a cancel culture are to be loving, patient, and humbly submissive to those in positions of authority (whoever they may be—1 Peter 2:13-14,18; 5:5-6), we must never stop teaching the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16). We must never harass, badger, and be unkind, but we must **continue** to scatter "the seed...the word of God" (Luke 8:11). We may not convince many, or any at all but, like Noah, we will preach (2 Peter 2:5).

Jesus responded to cancel culture by becoming the greatest Teacher the world has ever known. He responded to the opposition's "stop" with "go"—"**Go** into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). When threatened and commanded by Jewish authorities "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus," Peter and John said, "[W]e cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18-21). After the apostles' third arrest and interrogation, the Jewish council asked, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this [Jesus'] name?" Peter and the apostles replied: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:28-29). After the apostles were beaten and commanded once again "that they should not speak in the name of Jesus" (Acts 5:40), they were released. How did these





early disciples react to such intense cancel culture? They “rejoic[ed] that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And **daily** in the temple, and in every house, **they did not cease** teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:41-42).

People may accuse us of being unloving because we teach what Jesus taught—a message of repentance (Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3,5; 24:47; Acts 2:38). Our peers may hate us for teaching like our Lord—about heaven **and** hell (Matthew 25:31-46; Mark 8:42-48; John 14:1-6). Still, with all the love we can muster and with all the courage that God will give us, we continually teach of the saving power of Jesus Christ. As we go about our daily lives, we do so “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

## CONCLUSION

**P**ERHAPS no other words in Scripture better pertain to Christians living, thriving, and teaching in a cancel culture than 1 Peter 3:14-16. Peter, who repeatedly experienced cancel culture’s threats, bullying, and abuse, exhorted first-century saints who were about to face a “fiery trial” (1 Peter 4:12), saying:

Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Peter 3:14-16).<sup>17</sup>

And who but God knows, if your conduct is “honorable among the Gentiles...when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12)?<sup>18</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> “Cancel Culture” (2022), *Cambridge Dictionary*, October 3, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/cancel-culture>.
- <sup>2</sup> E.g., Scott Gleeson (2021), “Joe Rogan, Who Says He Was Almost Vaccinated, Tells Others ‘Get Vaccinated and Then Get Sick,’” October 14, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/10/14/joe-rogan-covid-vaccine/8448921002/>.
- <sup>3</sup> J.K. Rowling (2020), “J.K. Rowling Writes About Her Reasons for Speaking Out on Sex and Gender Issues,” June 10, <https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/jk-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/>.
- <sup>4</sup> Thomas Wheatley (2019), “A Virginia Teacher Is Fighting for His Religious Freedom. Good for Him,” *The Washington Post*, October 9, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/10/09/virginia-teacher-is-fighting-his-religious-freedom-good-him/>.
- <sup>5</sup> “Broad Support Filed at VA Supreme Court for High School Teacher Fired Over Pronoun Policy” (2022), Alliance Defending Freedom, May 24, <https://adfdmedia.org/case/vlaming-v-west-point-school-board>.
- <sup>6</sup> *Vlaming v. West Point School Board* (2022), Alliance Defending Freedom, July 25, <https://adfflegal.org/case/vlaming-v-west-point-school-board>.
- <sup>7</sup> “Broad Support...”
- <sup>8</sup> Jesse T. Jackson (2021), “Twitter Locks Out Focus on the Family Magazine for Calling a Transgender Woman a Man,” February 1, <https://churchleaders.com/news/389324-twitter-locks-out-focus-on-the-family-magazine-for-calling-a-transgender-woman-a-man.html>.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Christopher J. Brooks (2021), “TripWire Interactive CEO Steps Down After Supporting Texas Abortion Law,” September 7, *CBS News*, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tripwire-texas-abortion-john-gibson-gaming-tweet/>.
- <sup>11</sup> “How the U.S. Religious Composition Has Changed in Recent Decades” (2022), Pew Research Center, September 13, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/how-u-s-religious-composition-has-changed-in-recent-decades/>.
- <sup>12</sup> NIV.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Eric Lyons (2017), “Noah, the Flood, and 120 Years,” Apologetics Press, <https://apologeticspress.org/noah-the-flood-and-120-years-5374/>.
- <sup>14</sup> Eric Lyons (2011), “The Ungodly Irrationality Surrounding Unwanted Infants,” Apologetics Press, <https://apologeticspress.org/the-ungodly-irrationality-surrounding-unwanted-infants-3506/>.
- <sup>15</sup> From the Greek *anupokritos*, which is from *hupokrites* (from which we get our English word “hypocrite”).
- <sup>16</sup> Which, sadly, seems to be the case with some hard-hearted “Christian” hypocrites.
- <sup>17</sup> NIV.
- <sup>18</sup> It seems likely that this “day of visitation” is a reference to the day that a non-Christian becomes a child of God—when the Lord would, in a sense, “visit me with Your salvation” (Psalm 106:4).



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## The Editor



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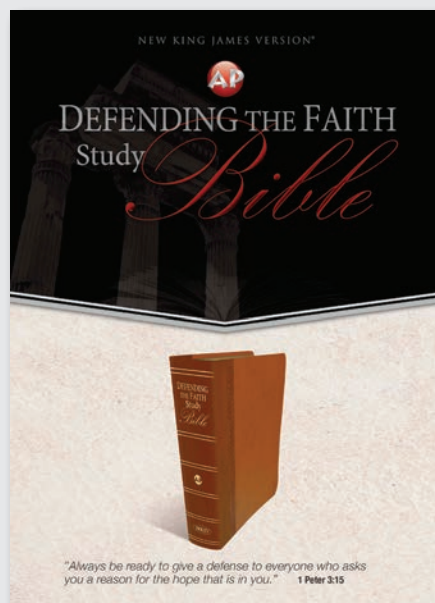
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